

RECLAMATION

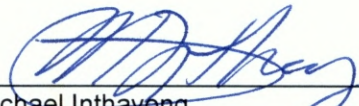
Managing Water in the West

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District and Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District Banking Program 2010-2026


FONSI-09-92

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Bureau of Reclamation
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Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, the South-Central California Area Office of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), has determined that the approval for Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District (DEID) to bank its CVP and 215 Water (when available) in Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District (RRBWSD) is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment and an environmental impact statement is not required. This Finding of No Significant Impact is supported by Reclamation's Final Environmental Assessment (EA) Number EA-09-92, *Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District and Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District, 2010 – 2026*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Reclamation made the Draft EA and Draft FONSI available for public comment from October 20 through October 29, 2009, and subsequently extended the closing date until November 5, 2009. Reclamation received a set of comments and has addressed those considered to be substantive in the appropriate sections within the Final EA.

Background

DEID has requested that Reclamation approve its desire to bank water supplies that exceed the current demand to their immediate need in RRBWSD on an annual basis. The use of Central Valley Project (CVP) and 215 Water for the purpose of groundwater banking outside its contract service area provides DEID with operational flexibility and facilitates better management of its water supply. Upon request, RRBWSD will return the banked water to DEID minus an agreed upon leave-behind amount.

Under the Proposed Action, Reclamation will approve the delivery of DEID's CVP water and 215 Water (when available) supplies for banking outside of their service area boundary in RRBWSD. DEID will deliver up to 80,000 acre-feet (af) per year (af/y) to be banked in RRBWSD from April 2010 through February 2026. DEID will be allowed to store up to 100,000 af maximum at any one time, and RRBWSD will return up to 10,000 af/y to DEID upon request. Banking by DEID within RRBWSD will be on an up to 2:1 ratio; where a 1:1 banking to return ratio will be "bucket for bucket" (minus a six to ten percent loss), and a ratio of 2:1 will involve the return of 1 af to DEID for every 2 af of water banked in RRBWSD. Regarding the 2:1 banking arrangement, DEID intends to provide 215 Water and/or non-CVP water to account for the remaining balance of the arrangement (1 af of the banked water will be CVP water while 215 Water and/or non-CVP water will make up the rest of the up to 2 af). At this time, Reclamation has yet to develop the necessary contractual regulations, policies, or guidelines for groundwater banking to include 215 Water being left behind in a 2:1 banking to delivery ratio. Subsequently, additional environmental review may be required regarding the leave-behind water(s) as part of the 2:1 banking.

As described in more detail in Section 2.2 of the Final EA, the Proposed Action will involve the use of the Friant-Kern Canal (FKC), Cross Valley Canal (CVC), Kern River, and/or other existing intermediate facilities to convey water involved with the project.

Findings

Water Resources

The Proposed Action will not interfere with the normal operations of any district involved with the banking program, nor will it impede any State Water Project or CVP obligations to deliver water to other contractors or to local fish and wildlife habitat. The delivery and extraction of the waters involved with the Proposed Action will occur during times when Reclamation and/or the Friant Water Authority determines that there is excess capacity in the FKC, and the Kern County Water Authority similarly determining that the CVC will be able to accommodate the additional water. The implementation of the banking program between DEID and RRBWSD will not have significant impacts on the conveyance facilities and surface water resources.

The Proposed Action will provide DEID with surface water reliability and likely decrease reliance on groundwater pumping by its landowners during drought years. The Proposed Action will result in a net increase in groundwater levels underlying RRBWSD since more water will be delivered to the groundwater subbasin underlying the project area than will have occurred absent the project. The banking program could also result in improved groundwater quality in the Kern County Groundwater Subbasin; therefore, the Proposed Action could have a beneficial impact on groundwater resources.

Since Arvin-Edison Water Storage District's (AEWSD) turnout off the FKC is less than 100 feet from the FKC/CVC Intertie, this alternative for returning DEID's banked water could have a minor impact to AEWSD's water quality. As a result, Reclamation will require that an additional approved water quality monitoring program is conducted near AEWSD's turnout. A baseline sample will be taken before CVC water is introduced into the FKC and then subsequent testing will be performed during the period in which return water from the CVC is introduced into the FKC. If the quality of water at this location fails to meet agriculture, municipal, and industrial water quality standards then the Proposed Action will cease until water quality is improved to meet those standards. The use of pump-back facilities to either directly deliver the return water to DEID and/or engage in operational exchanges with other districts having access to the FKC will preclude any adverse water quality impacts to AEWSD. In addition, the return of DEID's banked water not involving the use of the FKC/CVC Intertie will not impact AEWSD's water quality.

All waters introduced and conveyed through the FKC must meet Reclamation water quality standards. If through monitoring the water pumped from one or more of RRBWSD's extraction wells fail to meet the criteria for discharging groundwater into either the CVC and subsequently into the FKC, the water from that well will not be allowed to be introduced into either facility until subsequent testing and/or treatment have demonstrated that the water quality has been met by the criteria as outlined in Title 22. Similarly, the same water quality requirements will need to be met before any waters involved with the Proposed Action is diverted into the Kern River. There will be no significant impacts to water quality as a result of the Proposed Action.

Land Use

DEID's water to be banked will be reregulated through RRBWSD's existing banking facilities and will not require the modification or construction of new conveyance facilities. The Proposed

Action will not result in increased or decreased water supplies in DEID or RRBWSD that will induce growth or land use changes as both districts are fully built out and supply no water to customers other than agricultural users. There will be no significant impacts to land use as a result of the Proposed Action.

Biological Resources

Water demands and conditions in the project area will not change and no new facilities will be constructed, and therefore, there will be no direct effects on listed species or designated critical habitat. The waters involved with the Proposed Action will not involve the conversion of any land and will therefore not change the land use patterns of the cultivated or fallowed fields that do have some value to listed species or birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Since no natural stream courses alteration will occur, there will be no effects on listed fish species. The Proposed Action will not result in significant impacts to biological resources.

Cultural Resources

The banking program will be accomplished using existing facilities so there would be no new construction or ground disturbance. No new lands will be put into agricultural production as a result of the banking program; therefore, the Proposed Action involves the type of activity that has no potential to significantly impact historic properties.

Indian Trust Assets

Approval of the banking program between DEID and RRBWSD will not involve any construction and will utilize existing conveyance facilities; therefore, activities associated with the Proposed Action will not have significant impacts on Indian Trust Assets.

Socioeconomic Resources

The Proposed Action will provide water supply reliability to DEID that will help to sustain existing croplands. Businesses and farm workers rely on these crops to maintain jobs. The Proposed Action will continue to support the economic vitality in the region; therefore, no significant impacts to socioeconomic resources are anticipated.

Environmental Justice

Under the Proposed Action, the ability to manage its varied water resources will help maintain agricultural production and local employment in DEID. The Proposed Action will not affect low-income or disadvantaged populations within the districts by not causing dislocation, changes in employment, or increase flood, drought, or disease. Employment opportunities for low-income wage earners and minority population groups will be within historical conditions and disadvantaged populations will not be subject to disproportionate impacts; therefore, there will be no significant impacts.

Air Quality

The movement of water between DEID, RRBWSD, and other potential exchange partners will be done via gravity flow and/or pumped using electric motors which have no emissions. In addition, extraction of banked groundwater from RRBWSD's three extraction wells will be pumped using electric motors which do not emit emissions that will contribute to air quality impacts. The air quality emissions from electrical power have been considered in environmental

documentation for the generating power plant. The Proposed Action will not involve any construction or land disturbing activities that could lead to fugitive dust emissions and/or exhaust emissions associated with the operations of heavy machinery. In the event that reverse pumping in the FKC is required to return banked water to DEID, a portable diesel pump at three check structures will be required to perform such actions. If all three diesel pumps were utilized to reverse pump all of the annual return water back to DEID, its total emissions will still be well below the *de minimis* thresholds for the San Joaquin Valley Air Board; therefore, there will be no significant air quality impacts associated with this project.

Cumulative Impacts

The Proposed Action will maintain existing land uses and would not contribute to cumulative changes or impacts to land uses or planning. Land use trends around the action area in recent years have resulted in urbanization of agricultural lands. This trend is typically caused by economic pressure and is likely to continue with or without this banking program. Therefore, there will be no cumulative effects to land use as a result of the Proposed Action.

The groundwater extraction wells involved with this project are located within RRBWSD's existing banking facilities and will not interfere with any private wells. RRBWSD has been banking groundwater for in-district use for over 40 years. Groundwater levels in the area will also slightly increase since some of the water banked would be left behind for recharge purposes. In addition, the groundwater level underlying DEID could experience a beneficial cumulative impact over the course of this project because landowners in DEID will need to rely less on groundwater pumping during dry years. The Proposed Action when added to other similar current and proposed actions may result in beneficial cumulative impacts to groundwater resources on a small scale.

Since AEWSD is the last CVP contractor on the FKC system, the CVP water they receive from their FKC turnout could potentially contain sources of non-CVP water as a result of cumulative projects. Similarly, CVC water could contain a variety of sources resulting from other similar existing and/or foreseeable projects at any given time. The Proposed Action could involve CVC water being introduced into the FKC and commingling with CVP that will ultimately divert into AEWSD's turnout. When taking into consideration other similar existing and/or foreseeable projects, the quality of this water will still meet Title 22 standards and irrigation water standards. In addition, water quality requirements will need to be met and excess capacity exists before the FKC, CVC, and/or Kern River is utilized; therefore, the Proposed Action will not contribute to significant cumulative adverse impacts to water quality and overall water resources.

As in the past, hydrological conditions and other factors are likely to result in fluctuating water supplies and this drives requests for water service actions such as water banking. Water districts aim to provide water to their customers based on available water supplies and timing, all while attempting to minimize costs. Farmers irrigate and grow crops based on these conditions and factors, and a myriad of water service actions are approved and executed each year to facilitate water needs. Each water service transaction involving Reclamation undergoes environmental review prior to approval. Due to the general nature of water banking, the project will have no adverse impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable.